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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003930

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV, USPACOM FOR FPA HUSO

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TAGS: [PINR](#) [MOPS](#) [PHUM](#) [TH](#) [BM](#) [BURMA](#)

SUBJECT: (C) THAILAND: ALLEGED USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS
ALONG THAI BORDER (C-AL5-00590)

REF: A) STATE 101852 B) RANGOON 714

Classified By: Classified by Political Counselor Robert J. Clarke, Reas
on: 1.4 (c) and (d)

1. (S) Summary: The senior Thai Foreign Ministry (MFA) official covering Burma told poloffs that the Royal Thai Government (RTG) has no hard evidence confirming the reported use of chemical weapons by the Burmese Army against ethnic Karenni soldiers near the Thai border in February 2005. These reports originated with representatives of NGOs in Thailand and the international NGO Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) which described the claimed effects of chemical weapons on Karenni soldiers. Subsequently, two Burma Army defectors claimed that they saw chemical weapons stocks and had witnessed the firing of chemical weapons mortars by Burmese troops. The RTG says it has investigated the chemical weapons use claims and found no solid evidence substantiating the reports. Responses to specific questions in Reftel can be found in keyed answers below. Embassy Rangoon and Consulate General Chiang Mai have cleared on this message. End Summary.

2. (S) Please find responses to questions in Reftel Paragraph 4, section A, below.

1) On June 13, Minister Counselor Damrong Kraikruan, the MFA Burma Desk Officer, told poloffs that the RTG took note of allegations reported by CSW and "indirectly" contacted CSW and others to investigate the claims. He said the RTG had not found any credible evidence of chemical weapons use. He stated that neither CSW nor the United Nations had contacted the RTG about this issue, and indicated that the RTG is not any longer actively investigating this issue.

2) Damrong stated that some Thai officials, whom he did not name or identify by agency, had asked Burmese SPDC officials about the reports. The Burmese, he said, denied any use of chemical weapons.

3) Poloff spoke with Dr. Martin Panter of CSW, who stated that he had learned about the alleged chemical weapons attack from a well-known resident private Amciti in Thailand, David Eubanks. Eubanks is the founder of an NGO, the Free Burma Rangers (FBR), which clandestinely crosses the Thai-Burma border with armed Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) escorts to provide humanitarian relief, mostly medical, to displaced ethnic minority persons and others in Burma. Panter stated that CSW had been documenting human rights abuses in Karen, Karenni and Mon states for more than 15 years. CSW, he said, previously reported on suspected chemical weapons use by the Burma Army but there was very little international interest. Panter stated he has been coming to the Thai Burma border area since 1987, first to teach health and tropical medicine in refugee camp clinics and later in some areas inside Burma. He has worked mostly with the Karen, and began working with Karenni at their invitation in 1992. He stated that CSW has an ongoing health project in the large Mae La refugee camp outside of Mae Sot, Thailand. He noted that in 1995 there was a report of biological weapons use by the Burma Army's 7th Brigade of the Burma Army, but CSW did not issue a public report at that time due to lack of evidence.

4) Post is not aware of any official investigation by the United Nations in Bangkok. Panter told Poloff that the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma, Prof. Paulo Pinheiro, had contacted CSW, but Panter did not know the status of Pinheiro's inquiries.

3. (S) Poloff contacted David Eubanks, who recounted that he had been deep inside nearby Karen State in early February when a contact of his at the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) headquarters called him by satellite phone to report that shells had landed at the base which emitted a strange odor and smoke that caused burns and nausea to some of the KNPP fighters. A few days later, Eubanks claimed he had proceeded to the KNPP camp and accompanied 3 injured KNPP fighters to a private Christian hospital in Chiang Mai, where they were treated by an expatriate physician. Eubanks then contacted Panter, who arrived in Chiang Mai from Australia, where he resides, in early March. Panter claimed that he used "Jane's Biochemical Weapons Guide," a matrix of

examination criteria used in determining the treatment of those suspected of being exposed to chemical weapons attacks, to perform individual evaluations, including a medical history and physical examination. He stated that his examinations indicated "a very high likelihood" of a chemical attack. Panter returned to Thailand in mid-April when two Burma Army soldiers defected to the Karenni. The two teenage soldiers claimed that they had been required as new Burma Army conscripts to haul mortar shells stored in boxes marked with skull and crossbones. They claimed they had witnessed the firing of these shells by troops wearing gas masks and gloves.

14. (S) The following are responses to questions in Reftel Paragraph 4, section B.

1) There is no evidence that the RTG is attempting to ignore the reported use of chemical weapons in order to maintain good relations with the SPDC. In fact, their willingness to bring it up directly with the Burmese authorities indicates how seriously they have taken this issue.

2) MFA official Damrong stated that if the allegations proved to be true, it would have a "very serious" impact on Thai-Burma relations.

3) Damrong said no samples of chemical weapons use (clothes, shell casings, etc.) were received by the RTG. There is no indication the RTG visited the site of the claimed use of chemical weapons.

4) The RTG did not approach CSW directly, which was confirmed by CSW. Damrong indicated that the RTG had "indirectly" made inquiries, but did not provide details. (Comment: Damrong's use of "indirectly" means that Thai intelligence assets were involved. End Comment.)

5) According to David Eubanks of FBR, an unnamed expatriate medical doctor, who has worked two years at a private Christian hospital in Chiang Mai, treated three Karenni men who were exposed to the claimed chemical agents. The doctor determined that they were exposed to some chemical substance but, since the doctor had no training in chemical weapons, could not determine what it was. The three men were later taken to a Thai hospital, where the Thai doctors refused to treat them. FBR claims to have videotaped interviews with the three Karenni men and still photo footage of their wounds. Eubanks opined that it was tear gas or some other chemical agent that caused their wounds. Eubanks claims that the KNPP provided him with shell fragments and soil samples, which he sent to a friend of his, a retired Thai Army General. Eubanks said his former General friend has not contacted him since he handed over the samples. He also claimed that some journalists from the UK were given soil samples, which reportedly tested negative for chemical agents by a laboratory in the UK. Eubanks said he passed on the information to CSW because FBR could not run the story publicly out of fear of offending the Thai government.

BOYCE